

ANNUAL ADDRESS

DELIVERED BEFORE THE

ESSEX AGRICULTURAL SOCIETY

BY

HON. ROBERT S. RANTOUL,

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AT PEABODY,

SEPTEMBER 24TH, 1896.

SALEM, MASS. :  
NEWCOMB & GAUSS, PRINTERS,  
1896.

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ADDRESS.

The speaker who would address this body finds himself embarrassed, at the start, with a plethora of topics. The whole field of agriculture—ancient and modern—lies open before him. He may treat agriculture historically, as the most venerable of callings, characterized as the “noblest of pursuits” by Timothy Pickering in your early by-laws. He may trace its growth and development since Adam delved and Noah began to be an husbandman and planted a vineyard. Or he may treat agriculture scientifically, as a grand, untiring chemical process, converting the elements of the air and soil into fruits and root-crops and cereals in the first instance, and these in turn, passed once through the potent alembic of the animal economy,—thus one degree removed from the simple products of the soil,—being rendered into human food in a secondary or condensed condition, as beef and pork and mutton and dairy products and poultry,—the very expressed essence of vegetable life. Or he may treat agriculture from its social and political side,—showing the varying tenures by which its votaries have held, from time to time, the soil they tilled, the varying burthens imposed, from time to time, on land and those who dress it,—showing the varying rank assigned the husbandman, from time to time, in the estimation of mankind. Or he may trace agriculture in its new adaptation of means to ends,—analyses of soils and manures,—rotation of crops,—ever new applications of processes and contrivances,—skilful crossing of varieties

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and strains and types,—which modern specialism has brought to light since the establishment of schools of husbandry a century ago—since the introduction of agricultural chemistry, a branch of science only half a century of age. Or he may content himself and perhaps his audience with reading a prose idyl on the charms of country living.

But again he may abandon all this. There are still other topics open to the speaker, which, if he be of an antiquarian turn, he will find it difficult indeed to resist. He is addressing a society now four score years of age. It has its local traditions and a story which no son of Essex can but recall with pride. It bears recorded on its honorable roll, most of the brightest names this ancient, populous, intelligent and historic section has produced. It embraces a whole County, and that County the third in population, wealth and rank, in all the fourteen counties of the State,—a county second to none in the variety of its industries, in the character, thrift, culture and achievements of its people, or, for it embraces Beverly, Gloucester, Manchester, Topsfield, Andover and the Merrimac, in the grandeur of its ocean scenery or in the quiet, winning beauty of its rural landscape. He is addressing a society which had for its founder in 1817-18 no less a personage than that stalwart old Roman—that modern Cincinnatus, that stormy-petrel of Massachusetts politics,—Colonel Timothy Pickering—and the temptation to any one who knows his checkered and extraordinary career,—you remember that he took your first prize at a plowing match, when seventy-five years old,—the temptation to postpone all else until he has exhausted that, is so imperious, —so well nigh irresistible, that only the imminence of the dinner hour, and an increasing sense of the emptiness of things below, is able to restrain me from inviting you to listen to an abstract of his life.

Turning his face from this engaging picture, the orator

who addresses this body might well invite you to a review, —hurried and inadequate though it could not fail to be, —of the record of your own career. Should he rehearse this, he would point for inspiration to such names as Story and White and Saltonstall and Cummins and Cleaveland and Nichols and Merrill and all that splendid group of worthies, who took early part with Pickering in assuring your success.

It would be a story of intelligent and public-spirited attempts to make of a not too generous soil, described in the first of the series of practical annual addresses from Col. Pickering, in 1820, as “already exhausted and needing manures”—to make of the old historic farms of Essex county, standing—scores of them,—in the names of the original settlers—so many of them that your prize lists read today like the records of baptisms and burials in the early churches,—to make of such a patrimony a fit abiding place for themselves and those who should come after them. It would be a story of experiments costly of time and means,—too often ending in defeat,—in many of the vital problems of the present hour:—In the promotion and encouragement of tree-culture, for example,—premiums offered, year after year, for seedling forest trees, in half-acre and acre lots, raised mainly for the shipyards, but also for fuel and for bark,—bounties on sumach, in the interests of the tanneries,—bounties on larch, a new thing, then, in ship-building,—on hackmetac, on white ash, on the oaks, for the use of shipwrights,—bounties on hickory for the coopers,—not neglecting bounties on the locust and white mulberry and sugar-maple;—it would be a story of large funds, raised by private gift, in order that the state bounty, just offered in a conditional act of 1819, might be secured to brave old Essex;—the story of a trial of Alderney stock, as early as 1826;—a story of scant attention paid to horses and to sheep, whilst boldly launching out in a fifteen



years' effort to force silk-culture and the introduction of the mulberry;—a story of failure in a vigorous attempt to introduce "live fences," as the records then called hedges,—of first turning attention, from 1835 to 1840, to horse-ploughing, to nurseries, to kitchen-gardening, to the dynamometer;—a story, finally, of great account naturally made of drainage, but of quite as much attention paid (and this I cannot understand) in essays and bounties and committees and gratuities, to the subject of irrigation, as to drainage. To a layman (and you see before you a very lame 'un), it would seem that irrigation was a problem foreign to the agriculture of Essex county. But it has not been so treated. And I am driven for an explanation to the perilous conjecture that, as this watering problem can by no possibility have had to do, in any way, with the milk supply, it must have borne some hidden relation to the troublesome cider problem, for very great attention was paid, in early years, to cider,—cider bounties, cider gratuities, cider committees, cider essays,—until, in 1834, a vote was passed condemning the barrel of cider which should take the first premium each year, for immediate consumption at the annual dinner, and this siderial frenzy finally giving way before a growing adverse sentiment, and a premium offered at last for the best essay on feeding cider-apples to swine and fat cattle, in the very year of all others of this century, the year of the hard-cider campaign of 1840.

These brilliant annual gatherings culminated in the splendid fair at Lynn in 1848—the society then a generation old—the finest show thus far—where there were seen twenty-nine ploughs, and an unrivaled field of stock, and Daniel Webster—show enough in himself—amongst the speakers at the dinner:—the society later extending its fairs to cover two days each, and holding them at the same spot for two or three consecutive years:—then debating long and well the problem of a permanent location:—first

in 1825, favoring for a domicile the Switzerland of this region, Topsfield, the scene of all their earlier successes, for it was, in old stage days, the metropolis of Essex county:—then deferring action because two other towns, Newbury and South Danvers, both had their advocates:—then, in 1860, again proposing Topsfield, for the Treadwell Farm had then come into the Society's possession; and now at last, after a migratory, nomadic life of two completed generations, comfortably housed under a roof-tree of its own at Peabody.

But I set my face against all these temptations because I wish to say a word on one or two topics of present interest to the agriculture of the county.

Massachusetts has always been the most thickly settled of the States except Rhode Island. Amongst the fourteen counties of Massachusetts, Essex County has for many years ranked as third in wealth, population and importance, yielding precedence in these respects—outside of Suffolk County which is practically Boston—to Middlesex alone. It became a county in 1643. There are in Massachusetts thirty-nine towns which were settled before 1650. Twelve of these towns,—about one-third of the whole,—are in Essex County. You are not unprepared to hear that agriculture is an ancient craft in Essex County. No county in the State is older. In an old historic section agriculture is a tradition and not a new experiment. But had we time to look together at the census tables, they would disclose other facts to some of which you are not quite so well prepared to listen.

Essex County held, from the taking of the first census in 1765 and I know not how long before, down to the formation of this Society in 1817-18, the *first* rank—not the second nor the third—amongst the fourteen counties of Massachusetts, in population and wealth and all that makes a people strong and great. Essex County then paid one-

fifth of the entire tax-levy of the State. The State then contained twenty-six and only twenty-six great towns of 3000 inhabitants and upwards. Eleven of these so-called great towns—nearly one-half of them—were in Essex County. Of all the towns of four thousand inhabitants and upwards, Essex County had more than one-half. Shall I pause to enumerate these great towns, for every one of them was a trade-centre and furnished a natural market for farm-produce. They were Salem, second only to Boston, her 13,000 people being about one-sixth of the population of the County, and following her in the order of population came Newburyport, Gloucester, Marblehead, Beverly, Newbury, Lynn, Andover, Danvers, Ipswich and Haverhill,—a noble roll!

Will you pardon me if I venture one step further into the dry details of the census table, for I wish to ask your attention to a contrast or two between the condition of agriculture in this county now, and when your society was formed.

Essex County had in 1817-18 three towns—there were no cities chartered in the State then—three towns and no more, having a population of six thousand souls and upwards. One was Salem, another was Newburyport and the third was Gloucester. Essex County has today seven cities of 12,000 inhabitants and upwards and, besides these, five or six towns of 6,000 inhabitants and upwards. Is there no lesson for us in these statistics? These people are consumers—they must be fed. These facts have special meaning for the farmer. Will you be patient with me a moment if I endeavor to unfold it?

You tell me that I state nothing strange. Whilst the acreage under cultivation is substantially not enlarged, the population of the County has kept pace with the population of the Country. Essex County had, when Pickering and his noble fellows brought this Society into being, about



seventy-five thousand people. It has more than four times that number now,—about 330,000 people. They must be fed, and it needs only a glance to see what a *bonanza* Essex County farming might have proved with such a market at its door, but for the utter, unprecedented and revolutionizing change in other conditions of the problem. There is no class of persons in the county so directly and so vitally interested in this growth and centralizing of numbers as is the Essex County farmer.

It was the locomotive engine which made possible the development of the great northwest, and it was the locomotive engine which built up eastern cities at the expense of the surrounding towns, and the locomotive engine was not hit upon until ten years after this Society was founded. This contrivance, in conjunction with machinery superceding hand-work in so many manufactures, has robbed the country population of its natural increase, and hived our people together like bees, in the great industrial centres,—these are the factors in our migration problem which have made us from a rural into a city people. How thoroughly this change has followed will best appear again from the figures. In 1820 the proportion of the population of the County living in the three places which had 6,000 inhabitants and upwards, was just about one third, and half of them were in Salem. In 1895 the proportion of the people of the County living in places of 6,000 inhabitants and upwards, is thirteen-seventeenths of the whole. In other words, two people lived in the country then to one in a large town, and now thirteen people live in a city or large town to four in a town of less than 6,000 inhabitants.

Time would not serve me to ask how far the general thrift and comfort have kept pace with population. Undoubtedly these have advanced, and undoubtedly the Essex County farmer profits by it in full proportion with the world at large. But how has this apparent corner

in agricultural produce—this tremendous advance in the demand for human food in Essex County, with no considerable extension of the farming area, and a great gain in the facilities for reaching his buyer,—how have these changes affected the Essex County farmer?

If population grows and centres at points within his easy reach, but not too near, that helps him because it guarantees him larger sales and a quickened activity of demand. If population grows and centres at points too near him, his patrimony becomes too valuable to farm—the assessors are on his track with a larger tax-bill,—the land-operators are after him with speculative offers,—land which he held by the acre will be appraised by the foot, and he is confronted with a choice between adopting new and advanced methods of tillage or putting his farm up for sale in house-lots.

Modern facilities for getting about have revolutionized Essex County farming; whilst they have enlarged the farmers' market, they have vastly enlarged the area from which we draw supplies, and thus exposed him to a wider competition. Products which were staple crops in 1820 cannot now be raised here, because cheap transportation, first making possible the miraculous development of the great northwest, and then bringing its crops to our very threshold, have enabled other sections to lay these staples down in our markets cheaper than we can raise them. The farmer who would make his ends meet,—who would leave his ancestral birth-place to his boys, and encourage them to stay at home and till it,—must buy largely of what he consumes, and raise only that which his neighbors will buy of him to his advantage. The old Essex County idea that a farm was a tract of arable land on which to bring up a family, who were to inherit it and improve it as such, and who would be supported, in the main, by its varied products consumed on the spot, is becoming as extinct as the

dodo or the ichthyosaurus,—as strange and out of date as the old colonial farmhouse, with its lean-to slanting northward, and its roof-tree of hand-hewn rafters, garnished with pumpkins and crook-necks and bunches of braided onions and golden seed-corn and sweet-marjoram and pennyroyal, dry and savory, with here and there a home-cured ham, or a woodchuck's skin, or a dip of tallow candles, or some turkeys' wings to dust out the brick oven, hung up against the massive chimney-stack,—and with its ancient well-sweep outside, weighted at the end with a generous boulder of our native granite,—and over all in leafy majesty the grand old elm, like a protecting providence, spreading its sheltering arms against the vaulted azure of the heavens.

If his farm is within easy reach of some growing city he soon finds himself ranked amongst suburbans, and his property assessed accordingly. Summer sojourners come out to help consume his surplus and advance his prices. His milk and eggs and butter and poultry and kitchen-gardening and orchard products, so far as he does not serve them at his own board,—his hay and root crops and cabbages and squashes, will be consumed by boarders or sent to market in the neighboring centre. He will buy his meats where he buys his flour. The dust of our county highways no longer rises to the droves that used to stir it on their way to slaughter. No longer is it possible to raise beef and mutton in Essex County. Meats that once came to our shambles on the hoof, now come in sides and quarters, or in cans or extracts. We cannot compete with sections of the country within easy railroad reach where it is said they have corn to burn for fuel, and feed good wheat to fat cattle because it pays better to move it on the hoof than through the elevator,—and where our genial friend, the hog, dropped, it is said, into a hopper,—the parting smile still lingering on his lips,—may find himself writhing in

the cold embrace of merciless machinery, from which he shall emerge, by the turning of a crank at the rate of so many revolutions per minute, resolved into such elemental factors as sausages, glue, hams, bone-meal, souced feet and scrubbing-brushes; we cannot compete with a virgin soil that asks no nutriment and only waits to be broken up and planted—a flat, vegetable deposit left by some inland sea that has escaped its confines—a rich alluvial mould nine feet deep, it is said, in spots, and innocent for miles of such a feature as a scrub-tree or a pebble.

The farmer under all these influences becomes a tradesman. He is helped by his wits as much as by his bone and sinew. He is no longer the husbandman pure and simple, living on his acres,—driving his grist to mill,—doing his heavy work with the steers he bought this spring to beef them a little later,—hauling his heavy fertilizers about from mussel-flats and peat-meadow to muck-heap and compost-bed, and tramping to Boston with his bulky night-loads at the tedious pace of a double team of oxen. He buys his fertilizer by the barrel in fine powder, and flings it about as he would salt and pepper on an omelette. It may force and overtax his soil, but he must quicken up his methods. He ploughs and mows and reaps by horse-power. He rides to market behind a pair of cheerful steppers and, as I heard a witty agriculturist once remark in recounting the new methods,—instead of swinging the scythe or flail or plodding behind the plough through the heat of the solstice, he trots out briskly in the morning, as though on pleasure bent, for his mowing and reaping, and has a chilled plough to use when the heat is unendurable. Thus, I take it, is to be ultimately extracted the ray of sunshine that is latent in the cucumber. He lives by what he buys and sells rather than on what he sows and reaps. He watches the market. He raises the crop that is merchantable. He follows the price-lists as closely as he follows the weather



reports,—as keenly as the stock-broker keeps tally of the stock market, and prices current listed at the Broker's Board. He becomes less and less self-sustaining—more and more the business partner of the market-man and the produce-dealer. I have known a farm in northern New Hampshire where the household wore home-spun, woven on a hand-loom from the wool of sheep that cropped the scanty herbage of that hillside patrimony. This could not be seen in Essex County in our day. But probably it could have been seen here at the founding of this society, when Pickering and his associates were, in vigorous terms, denouncing a protective tariff as hostile to agriculture, and when raw cotton was sold by the pound over the counters of our shops, to be mixed with sheep's wool in the family spinning and weaving. If the farmer is to be the independent character we have known him, bearing the brunt of our historic struggles, backing our public school system when it needed backing, furnishing the conservative element in town finance and local politics, owning the soil in modest parcels, and pointed at as the model of quiet ease and content and manly superiority to the grinding ambition to be rich and great,—who stood at Lexington and Concord, at Saratoga and Louisburg and Ticonderoga and Trenton and fired on every field a shot heard round the world,—if he is to be all this, he must maintain his birthright by other means than old-school Essex County farming. He must reach out for markets to be opened to him by specializing his crops. He must avail himself of every new facility for distribution. He must cheapen his transportation methods. He must localize his sales. He must organize for freights, and multiply and magnify his markets nearer home where his produce can be delivered fresher and cheaper.

The cost of production is not a more legitimate element of price than is the cost of distribution. I have here a



copy of the Essex Gazette for April, 1771, in which it appears that from and after the spring months of that year, three ferry-boats are to pass and repass constantly between Beverly and Salem in place of the two that had done all the carrying there before, so that, as we are assured, "by this means and by the good attendance to be given, travellers may pass with great ease and dispatch." How much of the market which Salem and Marblehead and Lynn have afforded for years to the hay and root-crops and garden-truck from north of Essex Bridge, from Hamilton and Ipswich and Rowley and even beyond the Merrimac, could have existed under these conditions, before the Revolution, when the passage of Bass River was effected "with ease and despatch" in two or three mud-scows! Products which could only bear transportation a few miles in those days because it was so costly or slow or injurious, can now be sold thousands of miles from where they grow—California fruits,—West Indian,—Bermuda,—South American products throughout America,—New York and New Jersey and Ohio apples throughout Europe,—Wenham ice in India and the Orient,—Gloucester fish in the Ohio Valley.

So the farmer enjoys a wider market at the same time that he endures a keener competition. He must not only produce cheaply. He must reach his buyer cheaply. If the distant producer, farming where land is cheap and rich, can outdo him in the cost of production, he must be able to reach his market with fresher products or at lower freights or with more attractive varieties, or he is undone. The matter of the cheap and rapid distribution of products is quite too little studied. Coal is a good illustration. The value of coal as it comes out of the pit is a small fraction of what it costs us in our coal-bins,—coal at the pit, if it would not bear transportation all over the continent, would be almost worthless. The little village

centered round a coal pit, which could reach it with hand-barrows or supply itself with tip-carts would never create a demand that would sink a shaft below the surface, or, in other words, coal, where it is produced, is a drug in the market, and the price we pay for coal is made up mainly of the cost of distribution.

Now apply this, if you will, to Essex County farming. Every day my car-ride takes me through many acres of splendid cabbages and squashes,—inestimable esculents, in the words of Choate, but bulky crops to handle. These are destined to be sold at a very moderate figure in the Boston market. I never look at them without reflecting how unreasonable a fraction of the price per pound at which the buyer gets them is made up of the inordinate cost of primitive modes of transportation. If they could reach Boston by some cheaper way, the buyer would get them cheaper,—the farmer would make a better profit,—and his sales would steadily grow greater. When I listen at midnight to the rumble of that endless caravan of market-wagons which has been making its way through Salem for a century since Essex Bridge was opened,—a long, unbroken commissary-train rolling at day-break into Boston with the day's supply of hay and market-gardening,—I cannot resist the obvious reflection that close along-side the highway so laboriously traversed is an electric railway track, utterly unused from midnight until day-break, which is, or would seem to be, the natural medium for collecting and delivering the bulky freight requiring night transportation. If this is true of the Boston supply it is true also of the local markets of the county. These will develop more and more as the farmer specializes his crops, and concentrates his forces, and raises what will sell, and buys all else, and forgets all that delightful variety of farm-production, which went out with quilting bees, and home spinning and weaving, and peat fuel, and the grist mill. He must at his

peril, even if his acres suffer for the forcing, search out the potent fertilizer and plant the early delicacy,—something that will steal the march upon his vigilant and active neighbors, for the adage about the early bird that catches the worm is not more true than this,—that it is the early cucumber—the early celery—the early spinach—the early radish—the early lettuce—the early tomato, that catches the customer.

You do not fail to perceive the drift of my reflections, which time will not permit me to develop further. I would restore the individuality,—the autonomy,—the independent activity of the local market and make the smaller cities and greater towns self-reliant centres of consumption and distribution,—the parade of yesterday is precisely in this line,—I would have them precisely what they were before the railroad system built up at Boston a central market for eastern Massachusetts, and made of it, as it were, a great prehensile *octopus* cast up on the shore of Massachusetts Bay, reaching out for everything; and stretching its iron tentacles—its steel-rail tentacles, rather—for thirty miles around, and sucking into its inexorable maw, not your farm-products alone, but a good part of the business energy and brain-power and wealth-producing capacity and art capacity and capacity for recreation that belong of right to the surrounding country. I would have vegetables and fruits and butter and eggs and many of the products that depend on their freshness for their merchantable value, treated very much as milk, for instance, is treated to-day,—treated as they can well be treated when street railway lines perform their destined function—that is to say, transported not so much to a central market at Boston, where the wholesaler may deal them out to a country retailer, who often brings them back again,—but moving much more directly from producer to consumer. A little more organizing capacity and a little more independence in the rela-

tions between producer and consumer would dispense, in large part with the services of the middleman and save his profits to the bettering of both of them.

A class of reasoners has lately appeared who hold that taxes should be levied upon land alone. Land, they say, can be seen. It can not escape the grip of the tax-collector like stock-certificates and paper values. This view is most attractive to the average city resident. He holds no real estate. He expects to hold none. The view may become popular. Most people have their savings in stocks and banks and business securities mainly. But the farmer will have no easy task to reconcile this view with his prosperity. If the burthen of the public revenues is to be borne, in the first instance, by land, it would seem to follow, that the holding of land will be a more precarious investment than it is, inasmuch as a larger money return from the products of land must be assured every year in order to make the investment a safe one. There must be an ample reserve fund to meet contingencies. No man can then afford to take the risk of holding land except he have a plethoric bank-account to fall back upon to meet his taxes in case of crop-failure, or, what is quite as bad, in case of price-failure due to over-production. The acreage of the county, it would seem, must in this event pass out of the hands of the practical farmer and be absorbed by great land-proprietors, and the tiller of the soil be driven to trade, or to manufactures, or to the uncongenial lot of tilling his own birthright acres as the tenant of another. You say we are in no danger of this,—that the proposition needs only to be stated, to be scouted. The national election now in progress ought to persuade us that no political vagary is too fantastic to command its votaries—that there is no such thing as the impossible in politics. It is the whole people of the commonwealth who have the settlement of methods of taxation. In considering the single-tax proposition, the



farmer—the holder of arable land—will do well to remember that he is in a hopeless minority in this community—that he is no longer where Timothy Pickering left him, but—thanks to railroads and cotton-mills and machine methods generally—he is now outnumbered two to one by the city populations. The centre of gravity is shifted. Only one-ninth of the people of this state, in 1817-18, lived in the two towns, Boston and Salem, which had at that time population enough for a city charter. The other eight-ninths of the people lived in towns of less than twelve thousand inhabitants, or, in other words, eight times as many people lived in the country as in the city. To-day, considerably more than two-thirds of the people of this commonwealth live under city governments. Or in other words—more than twice as many people are living in the cities to-day as are living in the country, where they can smell the breath of kine and drink in the odors of the fresh-turned sod. The farmers of Essex County and the State, with quite as much acreage as ever to be taxed, and every foot of it quite as much in evidence as ever, find their voting strength as compared with the whole population, fatally belittled. Less than 50,000 acres of the soil of Essex County lie within the area of her seven cities. More than 225,000 acres of it lie in the twenty-eight towns of the county. The proportion in other parts of the state is pretty constant. I need not trouble you with the figures. So far, then, as the matter of a single land-tax is likely to become an issue to be determined between the city and the rural population, the dwellers under city charters, more than two-thirds of the people of the state, will find their interests little menaced by the proposal. The question involves a score of nice and difficult considerations. But it is easy to see, precisely for the reason of their difficulty and delicacy, that, to the average city dweller who gets his income from trade, from transportation, from the cotton-



mill or the shoe-factory,—who owns no land and hires the house he lives in, and has made no study of the abstract question of adjusting taxes, the proposition to levy a single tax, and that on land, has an attraction hard to be overcome. It looks simple—a great consideration in adjusting taxes—it looks easy to assess and difficult to evade. If you urge the terrible disturbance of prices and land tenures which must result, he looks complacently to the future, that special providence of schemers, to readjust such matters. I do not argue the probability or the improbability of such an issue. I merely call attention to it as a possibility, and to the hopeless preponderance of the cities over the towns,—of the non-holders over the holders of land, in population, in wealth, in political control, in everything except intelligence and character which goes to make up the collective potency of a people. And I venture the prediction that if a single tax on land is ever substituted for the present system, the Essex County farmer, as we have known him,—as he was known to Timothy Pickering in the opening quarter of this century—the master of a little farm, well tilled—the holder of his hundred acres upon which he first saw the sunlight smiling, and upon which it is his hope to live, and toil, and work out a career, and find his comfort and his refuge from corroding cares, and rear a family and die respected, will find himself ground to powder between the upper and the nether millstones of competition and taxation, and will disappear, in the long process of financial readjustment, like-flies in winter, out of sight forever.

May that day be distant! May some better fate await the farmer of Essex County! May we not live to see dear old Massachusetts with all her little farms—the very bed-rock of our splendid citizenship and personal independence and intelligence and martial strength,—may we not live to see this grand old commonwealth given over to any

baronial notions, born of a great landed proprietary, with its costly machinery and extravagant equipment and showy methods, within the reach of opulence alone—its aggrandizing tendencies, its unfraternal social leanings, by dint of which the haughty spirit of patronage may supplant the better instinct of good-fellowship and neighborly good-will, and Massachusetts grow to be—instead of the glorious ideal of the past, her little communities emulating one another in their successes—knit together more firmly by sharing one another's struggles,—instead of this her little town communities merged into one great centralized, consolidated factory village, with a few rich mill-owners and fancy farmers at the top and a mass of helpless, restless, discontented wage-earners looking up to them without appeal, as the arbiters of their fate.

Let me close with the hope that long before such a destiny shall overtake the farmers of this county, the new facilities for getting about and for the distribution of products,—the better roads we are to have—thanks mainly to summer pleasure-travel and the bicycle—protected, as I think they will be, by a premium offered by the towns on broad tires, equal in amount to the cost of the change to the farmer who adopts them,—the electric railway system, soon, I believe to be made more serviceable to the public and more remunerative to the investors, by being applied from midnight until day-break to the collecting and distributing of freight expressage—that these and other changes may make the toils of husbandry lighter and its profits greater,—and that specialized products and localized markets may add to the assurance with which the husbandman shall sow his crops and possess his acres. So that the agriculture of the county may approach the opening century with an unclouded future, and be what it has been to us, what it was to the founders of your society—what Timothy Pickering said it was, the “noblest of pursuits”,

—may still remain the stay of public confidence and credit—the anchorage ground of conservative hopes and aspirations—the equal hand-maid of commerce and the arts—the reliance of state and nation,—a staff in war, a cradle of good citizenship in peace, a training-school for patriots in both!









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